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AUTHOR Marinara, Martha
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ABSTRACT

Sylvia Plath's confessional poem, "Lady Lazarus" can be used to illustrate a connection between autobiography and social critique. "You poke and stir" among the institutions that form social relations--the educational system, the court system, the economic system--to find individuals whose lives, whose joys and pains, and struggles for survival have been involved with building, manipulating, consciously demolishing and rebuilding the cultural context(s) in which they form their lived relations. There is a connection between an academic perspective on student narratives and the critical work that has been done with confessional poetry such as Plath's. Some of the problems with reading confessional poetry parallel the difficulties caused by trying to critically read student autobiography. Teachers must help students deconstruct the opposition between personal and abstract writing. Teachers must ask their students to understand how their social roles and their individual autobiographies are determined by their cultural context, to step outside those roles and critique their contexts, and finally, by stepping back into their own stories, somehow to change their representations of cultural context in a way that accommodates collective stories. Students need to explore the "self," the events in their lives, the domestic as operating within the boundaries of a social context; to see their voices as part of a communal dialect that is neither fixed nor stable. (Contains 20 references.) (SAM)

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Martha Marinara
Department of Literature, Languages, and Dramatic Arts
Armstrong State College
11935 Abercorn Street
Savannah, GA 31419-1997

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Stirring the Ashes of Public Discourse

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"[L]ived" experience is not a given, given by a pure "reality," but the spontaneous "lived experience" of ideology in its particular relationship to the real.
Louis Althussar

I've drawn the title of this paper from Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus" in part because I wish to use her confessional poetry to illustrate the connection between autobiography and social critique, and also because I am struggling with the possibility that the writing of students' individual lives, the "hearing of [their] hearts," can become more actively involved with the construction of their cultural and political context. Both our cultural context and the meaning of "self" depend on the reciprocal nature of the relationship between self and society for structure and definition. "You poke and stir" among the institutions that form our social relations--the educational system, the court system, the economic system--and you find individuals whose lives, whose joys and pains, and struggles for survival have been involved with building, manipulating, consciously demolishing and rebuilding the cultural context(s) in which they form their lived relations.

Jerome Bruner describes"autobiography, not as a medium to recite a life that is "univocally given," but as a cognitive achievement, an "interpretive feat" that is "the same kind of construction of the human imagination as 'narrative' is" (Bruner 11-13). Bruner's argument is based

CS213779

on constructivist theories, notions that an individual's perceptual experience is shaped by cultural and linguistic conventions. He parallels his argument with Nelson Goodman's thesis that science and art are methods of "world making." "Just as it is worthwhile examining in minute detail how physics or history go about their world making," writes Bruner, "might we not be well advised to explore in equal detail what we do when we construct ourselves autobiographically?" (Bruner 14-15). At the end of "Life as Narrative," Bruner plays with the possibility that, along with concerning ourselves with the meaning of life narratives, we might consider "as well how they *might* have proceeded" (my emphasis). According to Bruner, "any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told" (Bruner 32). In considering potential or possible social futures, by retelling our life narratives, we may be able to contribute something new to our perspective of the world, something new to the world we are making.

Because my interest in Bruner extends beyond the possibilities outlined in his essay, beyond "the might have proceeded" to possible future selves and future cultural contexts, part of my exploring of autobiographical writing will include the interwoven relationship of our culturally constructed lives and the "world making" that our autobiographies might achieve. Certainly, bringing autobiography into the writing classroom is not new. Teaching practices in feminist classrooms, which include many informal tasks, such as journal writings, have been developed to "recover female experience." Neither are attempts to further the development of a pedagogy that views experience as a site from which to enhance critical thinking, where experience is viewed not as "natural," but as an historical and social construct. Working with students' autobiographical texts involves a reconceptualization of the

process of learning, a process which comes to be viewed as both revisionist and dialogic. As revision involves seeing from different perspectives, students come to recognize that the "self" is not a stable subject and, while involved in the process of revisioning, the individual as a multi-voiced subject contributes to the reshaping of history, his/her past, present and potential futures. Dialogic learning, according to Freire, allows for "moments when humans need to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (Freire and Shor 98). In the textual conversations between readers and writers, the relationship between critical reflection and active "world making" is emphasized. My purpose in working with student narratives is to help students discover in their own individual and interpersonal "world making" the importance of their "lives" as actively involved in constructing culture and in constructing political contexts.

In writing programs that draw their philosophies from social epistemic rhetorics, as defined by James Berlin, Henry Giroux, Pat Bizzell and other Marxists theorists, writing is seen as primarily a social activity. The emphasis in social epistemic classrooms is on a process of civic or public writing. As James Berlin explains in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Classroom,"

> Social-epistemic rhetoric attempts to place the question of ideology at the center of the teaching of writing. It offers both a detailed analysis of dehumanizing social experience and a self-critical and overtly historicized alternative based on democratic practices in the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres . . . . A rhetoric cannot escape the ideological question, and to ignore this is to fail our responsibilities as teachers and as citizens. (Berlin RI 493)

While attempting to foster cultural awareness and radical democracy by promoting critical thinking and collaborative learning, social epistemic

pedagogies ask students to question the accepted conventions of language use within the complexity social structures.

But, while personal narratives are encouraged, they are often part of the pre-writing process, part of the how-can-I-relate- to-this-reading problem. Later in the writing process personal narratives are carefully detached from the cultural conflict in question. As students revise their essays to mimic academic conventions, to follow a format of "thesis and proof," their written lives are pushed to the margins of their papers and to the margins of the cultural issue in question. Sometimes the students' own experiences are used as secondary details, the "proof" that supports their problematizing of social texts; often only considered as important inclusions in their final drafts if they successfully make connections between their own lives and the larger, seemingly fixed, social, historical, or cultural issues. As Sherry Ortner notes,

> . . . . although not every culture articulates a radical opposition between the domestic and the public, it is hardly contestable that the domestic is always subsumed by the public. (Sherry Ortner as quoted by Papoulis 10)

Students need to explore the "self," the events in their lives, the domestic as operating within the boundaries of a social context; to see their voices as part of a communal dialect that is neither fixed nor stable. We need, I think, to recognize that their voices do not have to be submerged in the voice of the academy, but can develop as voices different from ours and from each other's within the shifting political contexts and struggles of their communal classroom experience. In order to allow students to fully explore what it means to be subjects within a particular culture, we need to examine more closely the forms we use to teach

critical thinking and writing.

Irene Papoulis makes a compelling case for deconstructing the opposition between personal and abstract writing. Using feminist deconstructive criticism, Papoulis shows how the polarization of narrative and expository writing is directly related to the nature/culture, woman/man hierarchies and other arbitrary distinctions. Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir's arguments against placing women in the position of "immanence" because they bear children and are therefore closer to nature, Papoulis says that we need to understand that in truly engaging one's material, the writer does not distinguish between the "immanent" event and the "transcendent" idea, that "[o]ne can be immanent and transcendent simultaneously". She illustrates this simultaneity by defining personal narratives as a record of thinking through an issue:

> By 'personal writing' or 'narrative,' though, I do not necessarily mean stories about my cute pet cat named George, or even essays about the time my uncle died and I went to the funeral and learned something about life. Personal narrative, it seems to me, can be academically powerful tool when it becomes a record of 'what happens' as the writer examines an idea. (Papoulis 10)

According to Papoulis, academic aversion to personal narratives grows in part from a sense that telling stories about thinking through our lives and experiences, showing the process within the product, is somehow far less profound, less valuable than writing abstractly about a particular topic, a topic necessarily turned away from students' "individual" experiences towards a civic or public writing seemingly more concerned with collective or social issues.

While I agree with Papoulis' theory, I am still concerned with what to do with the stories students write about an uncle's funeral, the birth of

a sibling, the death of a friend. The relationship of immanence to transcendence is not an upward movement from the concrete to the abstract, but demands a constant tension between the material conditions of our lives and a continually reaching out "into an indefinitely open future" (DeBeauvoir xxxv). DeBeauvoir warns us that to fall from transcendence to immanence creates a stagnant, degradated existence, but there is also a problem with continually moving away from our material existence and, consequently, the material existence of others: "[E]ach separate conscious being aspires to set himself up alone as sovereign subject. Each tries to fulfill himself by reducing the other to slavery" (DeBeauvoir 140). In order to recognize that individuals are simultaneously both subject and object in a reciprocal manner, the concrete events in their lives need to be perceived as important and necessary components of the cognitive process that Papoulis encourages her students to narrate. Otherwise, we are still engaged in creating a hierarchy of the abstract idea over the concrete event; the product I would want then, while necessarily including subjective detail, is a narration of what goes on in a writer's mind as he/she thinks through an idea and would be removed from the materiality that encouraged that idea. The students' biographies, the events themselves lose any status within the meaning-making process if we shift their experiences to the borders of their writing and abstract ideas to the center. Their multi-voices excluded, students then work towards, and change to be included in, the culture of the academy. As a secondary part of a collective, academic voice, the events in their lives rather than working to chip away at and change the monolithic hierarchy of collective human culture, become assimilated in the workings of resistance and affirmation of the dominant ideology.

Because of the emphasis in social epistemic pedagogies on

collaborative learning and public voices, we tend to circumscribe personal narratives to freshman composition courses, and to work on them early in the semester only. But, as Linda Brodky, in her paper presented at last year's 4C's Conference, reminded me, public voices embedded in social issues often cover over the personal narratives from which social issues begin to form --the social rhetoric then moves far from the personal. Even in civic rhetoric, legal interpretation "takes place in a field of pain and death" and the consequences visible in legal rhetoric often "violently change people's lives." Just as in Brodky's readings of public litigations, where legal rhetorical forms often exist separate from content, we attempt to force our students to mold their own experiences into an acceptable academic, abstract form and then call it "reseeing." As a writing teacher who encourages personal narratives I find myself still implicated in the making of hierarchies when I look for a "transformation" of the writing self, by "order and selection," and encourage a dialectical move outward from the personal to a more public and political discourse; seeing the personal as resistive to "class" consciousness and social growth.

There is, I think, a connection between our academic perspective on student narratives and the critical work that has been done with confessional poetry. Confessional poetry is often considered narrowly as autobiography so that images and metaphors are forced to fit certain events in the writer's life. Irving Howe, in his damning critique of Sylvia Plath invokes Eliot's maxim concerning the confessional poem: "'Daddy' persuades once again, through the force of negative example, of how accurate T. S. Eliot was in saying '[t]he more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.'" Poems such as "Cut" and "Lady Lazarus" offend Howe because they yield to the confessional "temptation to reveal all while one

eye measures the effect of the revelation" (Howe 233-34). In like fashion, Elizabeth Hardwick cannot see any social, moral or communal values in Plath's poetry and is "disinclined to hope for general principles, sure origins, applications or lessons" (Hardwick 108).

While her criticism of Plath is certainly more positive, in her introduction to the 1990 edition of the Faber collection of Twentieth Century women's poetry, Fleur Adcock mirrors this prejudice of a mono-voiced collective human condition, the need for humanistic lessons, the desire to exalt the transcendent idea over auto/biography. She writes that much of the confessional poetry written in the 60s is "repellent and self-indulgent": "I am not interested in 'primal scream' writing: slabs of raw experience untransformed by any attempt at ordering and selection" (13). Paralleling what we want from our students' writing, Adcock's sense of poetic aesthetics requires a transformation from personal narrative to something more formally "universal," akin to a transcendent community experience, that "transform[s] . . . emotions and experiences into literature" (5). Adcock's praise of Sylvia Plath and subsequent inclusion of twenty of Plath's poems in the anthology, mark this line for Adcock between the important, brilliant poetry that merges craft and experience to create something of "general significance" and poetry that smothers the reader with biographical details and emotional confessions.

"Confessional" poetry depends for its power on its link to the subject, but an interpretive emphasis on personal authenticity fails to take into account the perspective that the poet's selfhood, the poet's personal voice becomes possible only through participation in the social and historical process. While Adcock and other critics consider many of Plath's female contemporaries to be confessional poets, the distinctions they make between Plath's work and the confessional genre seem arbitrary if one considers that moving away from the confessional mode

does not necessarily mean a move from the personal to the abstract.

For Adcock and other critics, Plath's writing moves on a precarious line, as she painfully draws from her private madness to create what Rochelle Ratner terms "deep visions, mystical experiences, prayers" (Ratner 309). Attempting to reject biographical criticism altogether because the "tortured, suicidal image" has done readings of her work more harm than good, Ratner further argues that the biographical details in Plath's poems are only included if they serve a more mythic or universal purpose. But, despite the earnest efforts by sympathetic critics to enlarge Plath's world, we end up with a vision that is depersonalized and obscure. Rather than exploring the potential resistance to a single faceted self created by the tension between public and private discourse, readings of Sylvia Plath often rely on a monolithic definition of "private self" that transcends her own biography, reducing her subjectivity to a more coherent, singular figure.

Plath's "confessional" poetry confronts the reader with a self that is not a representative, human ideal, but a voice which, as both the subject and object of her writing, is compelled to question both public and private definitions of self-narrative and writing. The subjects in her poems is imagined in fragments and combined with mosaics of history and culture. Plath struggles to construct her life and herself in order to create a public voice, to make a public performance, drawing her images from a narrative both personal and subconscious, social and consciously historical. Plath herself explained in a BBC interview her use of historical icons by noting that "personal experience shouldn't be a kind of shut box and mirror-looking narcissistic experience . . . it should be generally relevant, to such things as Hiroshima and Dachau" (Newman 64). While James Young points out that "it may never be clear to what extent she derived her pain from the knowledge of Hiroshima and Dachau or

merely 'used' these public experiences to figure her pain," (Young 136) these pieces of an overwhelming, painful modern reality--" a cake of soap/A wedding ring/a gold filling"--suggest that the metaphor she wrote to express her own pain may in fact highlight the dialectical exchange between the personal and the historical, the necessity of knowing the self by its political context.

But in attempting to reconcile the struggle between interiors and exteriors, this public self does not then emerge as a "hybrid self," is not an homogenized merger of public and private selves, which would deaden the very tensions that allow Plath to create. Anne Stevenson writes in Bitter Fame that "[t]he Ariel poems emerged from an enclosed world-- the crucible of Sylvia's inner being" (264). But the narrator of "Lady Lazarus" is introduced to us as a collection of patched together, inanimate objects:

> A sort of walking miracle, my skin
> Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
> My right foot a paperweight,
>
> My face a featureless, fine Jew linen.

The "I" of "Lady Lazarus" is not merely a singularly tragic or monolithic self, but an autobiographical persona that is a collection of parts--"my hands/My knees" -- a persona of "a million filaments" that is directly constructed, molded by the opinions and the needs of "[t]he peanut crunching crowd": "It's the theatrical / Comeback in broad day . . . . I am your opus,/I am your valuable." Not only does the narrator's self-creation instill this list of lifeless objects with the power to entertain, but so too does the circus audience's collaboration with the narrator's side show serve to reanimate the performer.

Plath's suicide attempts are neither private or personal. As Bundtzen writes, "Lady Lazarus tells us twice that the easy part is dying.

Its the 'comeback' before a 'peanut crunching crowd' that demands special skills-- that really knocks her out" (Bundtzen 29). The public nature of the event and others' reactions to her suicide attempt define her subjectivity. It is not a fixed, inner being that shapes Plath's sense of self, but a subjectivity created by its exteriors; a subjectivity which questions and "charges" the audience for playing it's part in her narrative. And it is the narrative of her dying and being "unwrap[ped]", the story of this struggle, that is echoed in Helene Cixous' description of feminine writing in "The Laugh of the Medusa" as that which is "infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another" (Cixous, 254). The constant exchange between an assumed, knowable interior and competing exteriors causes Plath to write and rewrite her "self."

From the autobiographical event to historical trophe, from personal pain to the historical victims of injustice and oppression with "skin / bright as a Nazi lampshade," Plath's "self" is defined by both the personal, as domestic, and the constraints of ideology. But this dialectical movement does not construct a kind of enclosure or encoding. The possibility of revolution, personal and social, exists in and subsists on this very movement, this shuttling between the domestic and the political which encompasses her biography. Plath reshapes a historical past and myth in order to understand her present personal history and to define a visible, representative self.

Although she claims to not be looking to universalize Plath's poetry and indeed kindly chastises those critics who attempt an "all embracing vision," (Bundtzen 9) in her book Plath's Incarnations, Bundtzen reads "Lady Lazarus" as a poem about overcoming the woman writer's anxiety concerning authorship, as an "allegory about the woman artist's struggle for autonomy" (33). Bundtzen writes that Plath "*identifies* the father-

god with "Nazi brutality, subsuming Plath's holocaust images with a revision of historical mythology: "both the male authorial will and the 'angel in the house' are deconstructed. The angel is *renamed* a masochistic Jew and she, rather than a madwoman, is the enemy within, the saboteur of woman's independence" (34, emphasis mine). But this identifying and revisioning turn Plath's writing of historical tropes to metaphors:

> Given the complex set of relationships that Plath sets up in "Lady Lazarus," it seems a waste to dwell overlong on the poem's confessional aspects, to worry whether this or that stanza refers to some incident in Plath's life, or to belabor the fact that Herr God may be a representation of her father or her husband. Whatever his origins in the circumstances of Plath's life, in this poem he is the usurper of Lady Lazarus's artistic powers. (Bundtzen 33)

Rather than reading the narrator of "Lady Lazarus" as a self who must learn to cope with a multiplicity of competing exteriors or to become that "pure gold baby /That melts to a [singular] shriek," Bundtzen separates the narrator's self into several allegorical figures-- a masochistic Jew, a sideshow stripper, an innocent scapegoat, a lioness-- explaining their existence as the "multiple, contradictory relationships between Lady Lazarus and both her audience and her creator" (Bundtzen 32). In Bundtzen's reading, the creator of these "multiple relationships" is not the narrator, but a separate power. Lady Lazarus only creates herself, only engages her creativity and power, when she emerges from the fire singular and whole to "eat men like air."

In her need to allegorize, her need to rescue Plath's work and keep it from possibly being victimized by her tragic autobiography, Bundtzen merely exchanges one sense of representation--the autobiographical--for

another--the religious and historical allegory. She not only wishes to move away from Plath's personal experiences, but also ignores Plath's attempts at historicizing, at placing her personal suffering and seeing her multiple selves within a shifting modern context. Howe, who is not a bit sympathetic to Plath's work, finds that Plath's use of holocaust imagery attempts to widen the scope of her concerns from personal anguish to the suffering of the Jews in the Nazi Holocaust (Howe 235). While he finds her imagery self-serving and politically illegitimate, Howe at least hints at the possibility of a connection between forming a personal autobiography and the historical context.

James Young points out that in writing her poems as a non-Jew, Plath uses Holocaust imagery to individualize an event that, for the community of Jewish readers, is always understood as collective, a catastrophy of an entire community, not one person. Young writes,

> Plath's personalization of events thus ignores the immense communal weight by which they have been grasped immediately by Jewish writers. Where Auschwitz and Belson are symbols of suffering for Plath--public ones, which carry no "sacred" charge--they are for the Jewish community at once symbols of specifically Jewish suffering and realities they either experienced first-hand or to which they are connected by the suffering of their community. (Young 144)

Plath is perceived to be outside the community of her own metaphors, not because she is a not Jewish, but because, as a Jewish writer, her understanding of Holocaust events would not have allowed her to use them in any way but as a collective suffering, never to refigure her personal pain. Because of the meaning assigned to terms like Auschwitz and Belsen by different discourse communities, Plath's metaphors lose their forceful

"confessional" connection as Plath is not related to the Holocaust on any level but her own literary identification.

But, as I've discussed earlier, confessional poetry is too often forced into narrow autobiographical interpretations that demand an almost "I-witness" authority. Understanding this method of interpretation as a "misguided emphasis" on "literary witness," Young is willing to accept Plath's Holocaust imagery because of the ways in which the Holocaust has publicly informed "the poet's view of the world and her representations of it in verse":

> After empathizing with other's pain and suffering, knowing it in the figure of herself, she now began to know herself also in their figures as well. . . . The choice of the Holocaust Jew as a trope by Plath has less to do with its intrinsic appropriateness than it does with its visibility as a public figure for suffering. (Young 145)

Plath's images of the mass and anonymous Jewish suffering during the Second World War were drawn from an era contemporary with her own life. Plath's historical memory was not only created by history books but from the images in newsreels, newspapers, and radio. Young writes that Plath's metaphors are "built upon the absorption of public experience, which is then internalized and made private by the poet, used to order her private world, and then re-externalized in public verse" (132). Suzanne Juhasz notes that Plath's confessional poetry, "the exaggerated nature of her suffering," . . ."results from living in the fifties, New England, the middle class" (88-89). I think, in separating the events of an era from specific events in Plath's life so that we can understand Plath's definitions of modern victimization, we still underestimate the importance of social context in shaping of the self and the self's power to reshape social context. "We might ask here," writes Young, "if it is ever

possible to separate the 'private' from the 'historical,' insofar as we may neither express our private lives without recourse to public language, nor know history except by ordering it privately" (132). It is Young's intent to allow the Holocaust to remain in "the realm of imagination," even in "inequitable metaphor," because only if the Holocaust remains in our memories can critics examine how the Holocaust has mattered and measure its impact (146).

When Theodore Adorno, from a deep sense of grief and depression over the extent of the Holocaust disasters, wrote "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric and this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today," (34) he was discussing the problematic relationship of art and society, of artists and politics. Adorno recognized that poetry can no longer be a fetish, autonomous, defining its aesthetics as existing outside of the context in which it was written. Any work of art, in distancing itself from society, only reproduces the culture's ideological structures within itself and becomes not separate and timeless, but a microcosm within the macrocosm. Though several critics of Plath's poetry, especially Alvin Rosenfield, question the assumption that her poems "expose the atrocity of the age through exposing self-inflicted wounds" (Rosenfield 127), Plath's confessional poetry, in its rejection of traditional forms and subject matter, attempts to set itself apart as a resistive structure. But Plath's poetry cannot be isolated from the dynamics of the wider society, and only serves to magnify the contradictions and tensions of a society marked by inequality and oppression. Plath's struggles with victimization are both created by and serve to create the victimization of the larger community.[8]

What is still missing from my critique of Plath's Holocaust poetry, and from social epistemic classrooms, is a sense of the power of the personal not only to form the self by reordering our understanding of past

history or public memory, but also to shape our present and future histories as well. I realize what we are asking our students to do is exceptionally difficult: to understand how their social roles and their individual autobiographies are determined by their cultural context, to step outside those roles and critique their cultural context, and finally, by stepping back into their own stories, somehow to change their cultural context in a way that accommodates their collective stories. Papoulis' borrowing of Simone de Beauvoir's theories of the possibility of merging the categories of "immanent" event and "transcendent" idea, de Beauvoir's insistence that "[o]ne can be immanent and transcendent *simultaneously*," (emphasis mine) suggests that this type of critique happens naturally or at least easily. But it doesn't. What we are asking them to do is work very hard at being cultural critics--to understand themselves both as part of a whole and to understand that, because of their role within the whole of culture, that whole is in constant flux. Theodore Adorno writes,

> Culture has become ideological not only as the quintessence of subjectively devised manifestations of the objective mind, but even more as the sphere of private life. The illusory importance and autonomy of private life conceals the fact that private life drags on only as an appendage of the social process. Life transforms itself into the ideology of reification- a death mask. Hence, the task of criticism must be not so much to search for the particular interest-groups to which cultural phenomena are to be assigned, but rather to decipher the general social tendencies which are expressed in these phenomena and through which the most powerful interests realize themselves. (30).

Adorno warns us that by keeping our personal experiences outside of the

realm of ideology, by positing the category of experience as the basis for inquiry, we merely allow the notion of the self as autonomous and in control. When the relationship between self and culture is ignored, there is a tendency for autobiography to become static and essentialized. Personal experience emerges as the "truth" of an individual subject, but the "self" is never as unified or knowable as students presume it to be. Rather than seeing experience as a method of understanding some essential truths, experiential writing needs to be perceived as a product of ideology.

Some of our problems with reading confessional poetry parallel the difficulties caused by personal experience essays, and by our recognizing, however subtlely, the difficulty of critically reading student autobiography. The subsequent clinging to the hierarchies that encourage public discourse and discourage personal narratives, comes from our own need to dispel or reconcile the contradictions of self and society--the private and the public--unearthed by the juxtaposition of post-structural theories and Western metaphysics: we are, at the same instant, singular and multiple; when working with others, we are both competitive and cooperative, both individual and social; and when we read/write and form knowledge, we are both the subject and the object of our own discourse imbedded in the discourse of others. These contradictions create a narrative of separation and connection, of individualism and community, and of necessity result in fluidity and movement. We are left with a self, both social and private, that resists a constant identity or hybridity. By not exploring the contradictions implied by a writing self that is both singular and multiple, we ignore the critical possibilities opened by the problematic relationship of self to discourse, of social identity to individual "lived experience." Accepting the diversity of a writing self underlies the acceptance of a dialectical movement not only from the

personal to the political, but also from the public back to the private self, a movement that not only supplies identification with class consciousness but also a place to critique this consciousness.

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